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PAGE 01 STATE 059439

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INFO OCT-01 CCO-00 SSO-00 ISO-00 NSCE-00 /011 R

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DRAFTED BY: S/S-O:ASHANKLE

APPROVED BY: S/S-O:ASHANKLE

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EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT PHNOM PENH 4831 ACTION SECSTATE, MARCH 18TH:

QUOTE

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 4831

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, PGOV, MOPS, PFOR, CB, US

SUBJ: STATUS REPORT BY THE AMBASSADOR AS OF MARCH 17

1. SINCE THE LOCAL NEWSPAPERS AND RADIO MAINTAIN NEARLY COMPLETE SILENCE ON THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON CAMBODIA PRESENTLY GOING ON IN THE U.S., MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE KHMERS LISTEN TO ENGLISH, FRENCH AND KHMER LANGUAGE BROADCASTS BEAMED TO CAMBODIA FROM THE OUTSIDE. FROM THESE BROADCASTS THEY HAVE RECEIVED IN PART THE IMPRESSION THAT SOME AMERICAN LEGISLATORS MAY BE WILLING TO VOTE SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE TO CAMBODIA IF PRESIDENT LON NOL STEEPED ASIDE. CERTAINLY THE PUBLIC DECLARATIONS BY SENATORS HUMPHREY, SCOTT AND SPARKMAN LEND SOME CREDENCE TO THIS LINE. SINCE MOST KHMERS ARE PRIMARILY INTERESTED IN SURVIVING AND ARE ALREADY DISILLUSIONED WITH THEIR PRESENT LEADERSHIP, THESE NEWS

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 059439

REPORTS HAVE NOT FALLEN ON DEAF EARS HERE.

2. AS REPORTED IN PREVIOUS MESSAGES LAST WEEK, MOST OF THE ASEAN REPRESENTATIVES HERE HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE MARSHAL SHOULD STEP DOWN, THAT THIS MIGHT HELP TO GET NECESSARY SUPPLEMENTAL AMERICAN ASSISTANCE, AND THAT THE TIME GAINED BY THESE DEVELOPMENTS SHOULD BE USED BY THE KHMERS THEMSELVES WITH THE HELP OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES TO FIND A CONTROLLED DENOUEMENT TO THE CONFLICT. NOTHING WE HAVE SAID HERE HAS ENCOURAGED OUR ASEAN COLLEAGUES TO TAKE THIS LINE; THEY HAVE COME TO THESE CONCLUSIONS INDEPENDENTLY AND THROUGH DISCUSSIONS AMONG THEMSELVES. WE HAVE REPEATEDLY STATED THAT IT IS NOT THE ROLE OF THE AMERICAN MISSION TO UNDERMINE THE CONSTITUTIONALLY CHOSEN KHMER LEADERSHIP, THE POSITION WE WERE INSTRUCTED TO TAKE BY THE DEPT IN ONE OF ITS RECENT MESSAGES.

3. OUR ASEAN DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES ARE TO A LARGE EXTENT ECHOING WHAT MANY LEADING KHMERS ARE SAYING AMONGST THEMSELVES: THE MARSHAL SHOULD STEP DOWN AS A PRICE FOR CONTINUED AMERICAN ASSESTANCE. APPARENTLY A MEETING BETWEEN ASEAN REPRESENTATIVES AND LONG BORET AND KEUKY LIM, THE PRIME MINISTER AND FOREIGN MINISTER RESPECTIVELY, ECHOED THIS REASONING (AS REPORTED THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS). THERE ARE ALSO GRUMBLINGS AMONG THE KHMER MILITARY THAT UNDER THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE BUT FOR THE MARSHAL TO STEP DOWN. ADMIRAL SARENDY, FOR EXAMPLE, MENTIONED THIS TO ME LAST WEEK. OUR ASSISTANT ARMY ATTACHES WHO ARE IN DAILY CONTACT WITH THE KHMER MILITARY AT MANY LEVELS HAVE PICKED UP SIMILAR ARGUMENTS FROM THEIR COLLEAGUES. THE ARGUMENTATION OF THESE PEOPLE IS ALWAYS THE SAME: TIME IS NEEDED TO WORK SOMETHING OUT WITH THE OTHER SIDE AND THE MARSHAL IS AN OBSTACLE BOTH TO SUPPLEMENTAL AMERICAN ASSISTANCE AND TO ANY CHANCE OF TALKS WITH THE OTHER SIDE. ONLY IF HE STEPS DOWN, THEY SAY, CAN THE GKR GAIN THE NECESSARY TIME TO FIND A SOLUTION.

4. FOR THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS MEMBERS OF MY STAFF,
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 059439

AS WELL AS MYSELF, HAVE STAYED OUT OF POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH KHMER LEADERS BECAUSE THIS WOULD GET US IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS SORT OF DISCUSSION. BASICALLY WHAT WE HAVE SAID TO THE KHMERS IS THAT DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR LEADERSHIP IS THEIR CONCERN ALONE AND NOT OURS.

5. OUR HANDS-OFF STANCE IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE KHMERS TO UNDERSTAND, SINCE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS

WE HAVE BEEN SO DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THEIR COUNTRY'S AFFAIRS. IN THE PAST WE HAVE NOT HESITATED TO ANSWER FORTHRIGHTLY THEIR QUESTIONS REGARDING SPECIFIC PERSONALITIES, WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE GOVERNMENT OR BE PROMOTED TO LEAD SPECIFIC FANK MILITARY UNITS OR WHATEVER. THEY HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS TO TURNING TO UNCLE SAM FOR ADVICE ON ALL SUBJECTS IMAGINABLE. NOW WE ARE GIVING THE APPEARANCE OF TELLING THEM THAT IT IS UP TO THEM TO RESOLVE THEIR OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS WITHOUT ANY INTERVENTION OR EVEN ADVICE FROM US. WHETHER THE KHMERS THEMSELVES WILL TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS AND ACT WITHOUT CONSULTING US ON A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP I CANNOT PREDICT. IT CAN NOT BE RULED OUT THAT THEY WILL DO SO. THE ONLY ONES WHO REALLY HAVE THE MEANS TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP HERE ARE THE MILITARY COMMANDERS AS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE SECOND REGION COMMANDER, THE 3RD DIVISION COMMANDER, 2ND DIVISION COMMANDER, AND OTHERS WHO HAVE THE PERSONAL LOYALTY OF A LARGE NUMBER OF COMBAT EFFECTIVE TROOPS. THE POLITICIANS REALLY HAVE NOT GOT THE CLOUT TO DO MORE THAN TALK ABOUT THEIR INTELLECTUAL PREFERENCES.

6. SINCE WE ARE STAYING OUT OF THE INTERNAL POLITICAL DEBATE HERE, OUR MISSION HAS FOCUSED ON MORE PRACTICAL MATTERS, SUCH AS SPURRING ON FANK TO TAKE THE NECESSARY MILITARY ACTION IN THE TUOL LEAP AREA IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE ROCKET THREAT TO POCHENTONG AIRPORT, WHICH REMAINS THE LIFELINE OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC. WE WERE OBVIOUSLY PLEASED TO SEE THE SUCCESS OF THAT MILITARY OPERATION, WHICH IN TURN HAS PERMITTED AN INCREASING NUMBER OF AMERICAN PLANES TO BRING IN NEEDED SUPPLIES.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 059439

7. WE HAVE ALSO BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN GETTING AIR CAMBODGE TO FLY AGAIN, WHICH IN TURN HAS INJECTED SOME NORMALCY INTO THE SITUATION. THE MARSHAL HAS FINALLY DECREED AN AMNESTY FOR DESERTERS, SOMETHING WE HAVE BEEN ADVOCATING FOR WEEKS IN THE HOPE THAT THIS WILL GENERATE MORE TROOPS FOR THE UNDERSTRENGTH FANK COMBAT UNITS.

8. EVERY DAY VOLUNTARY AGENCIES AND THE KHMER GOVERNMENT ARE DISTRIBUTING INCREASINGLY LARGER SUPPLIES OF PL 480 TITLE II COMMODITIES TO THE DESTITUTE AND NEEDY. OVER THE LAST WEEK WE HAVE EMPHASIZED THIS ASPECT OF OUR ACTIVITIES TO ALLEVIATE THE SUFFERING OF THE KHMER POPULACE AND GAIN SUPPORT FOR THE KHMER AUTHORITIES. I HAVE ALSO APPROACHED THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO REQUEST FROM

TOKYO THE RELEASE OF VOUNTGPART FUNDS TO BE USED BY THE KHMER GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE LARGE-SCALE HUMANITARIAN EFFORT MADE POSSIBLE BY THE TITLE II PROGRAM.

9. THE MILITARY SITUATION AROUND PHNOM PENH HAS BASICALLY REMAINED UNCHANGED OVER THE LAST WEEK. THE FALL OF THE SMALL ENCLAVE AT THE FERRY CROSSING ON THE WEST BANK OF THE MEKONG OPPOSITE NEAK LUONG MAY FREE SOME KC MILITARY UNITS WHICH COULD BE MOVED TO ATTACK THE SOUTHEASTERN PERIMETER OF PHNOM PENH. SINCE THAT FLANK IS ONLY LIGHTLY DEFENDED BY FANK, IT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY REQUIRE REPOSITIONING OF FANK UNITS AROUND PHNOM PENH, THEREBY INCREASING THE THREAT TO THE CAPITAL ITSELF FROM SOME OTHER DIRECTION. AT THE PRESENT TIME THE KHMER AIR FORCE IS DOING ALL IT CAN TO RESUPPLY NEAK LUONG BY AIR AND GIVE CLOSE AIR SUPPORT TO THE DEFENDERS. AS LONG AS NEAK LUONG HOLDS, IT WILL FIX A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ENEMY TROOPS AROUND THAT LAST REMAINING GKR POSITION ON THE LOWER MEKONG.

10. THE KHMER NAVY'S ASSETS HAVE BEEN DECIMATED DURING THE PAST TWO AND A HALF MONTHS AND FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES THEY CAN NO LONGER PARTICIPATE IN RESUPPLYING NEAK LUONG. THE KHMER AIR FORCE CONTINUES TO PERFORM WELL, BUT A NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN DAMAGED OR DESTROYED AS A RESULT OF ROCKET ATTACKS OR LUCKY SECRET

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PAGE 05 STATE 059439

HITS BY ENEMY GROUND FIRE. THE ENEMY, HOWEVER, ALSO APPEARS TO BE HURTING BECAUSE SO FAR THE KC HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HOLES IN THE FANK DEFENSE LINES AROUND PHNOM PENH BY PUNCHING THROUGH LARGE NUMBERS OF ENEMY FORCES. ACCORDING TO MY MILITARY EXPERTS, THE ENEMY IS USING ALL HE HAS GOT IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT A VICTORY IN PHNOM PENH. THEY ESTIMATE THAT THE ENEMY DOES NOT HAVE ANY RESERVES TO PUT INTO THE FRAY AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, THE ENEMY IS CLEARLY NOT HURTING FOR HEAVY WEAPONS AMMUNITION JUDGING FROM THE NUMBER OF 107 ROCKETS, HEAVY MORTAR FIRE AND ARTILLERY FIRE WHICH THE CITY AND MILITARY UNITS HAVE BEEN RECEIVING IN THE LAST FEW DAYS.

11. IN THE PROVINCES, THE SMALL PORT OF KAMPOT ON THE GULF OF THAILAND HAS BEEN UNDER HEAVY ATTACK, BUT SO FAR HAS BEEN ABLE TO RESIST SUCCESSFULLY BY DEFENDING A MUCH REDUCED PERIMETER. THE MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE IS NOT FAVORABLE, AS THE ENEMY APPEARS TO BE ABLE TO ATTACK AT WILL NEARLY ANY TARGET IN THE PROVINCE WITHOUT ENCOUNTERING STIFF FANK RESISTANCE. THE OTHER

ENCLAVES ARE RELATIVELY QUIET, PRIMARILY BECAUSE THE ENEMY HAS PULLED OUT HIS FRONT-LINE COMBAT UNITS FOR USE AGAINST HIGHER PRIORITY TARGETS, PRIMARILY PHNOM PENH AND THE LOWER MEKONG.

12. THE MISSION STAFF HAS REMAINED CALM IN THE FACE OF THE SITUATION I HAVE DESCRIBED ABOVE. SO HAVE THE MEMBERS OF THE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES FOR WHOM WE ARE RESPONSIBLE. THE LATTER ARE REDUCING THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE PROVINCIAL ENCLAVES THIS WEEK, SOMETHING WE HAVE ENCOURAGED IN ORDER TO HAVE BETTER CONTROL OVER THE AMERICANS FOR WHOM WE ARE RESPONSIBLE.

13. THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE CITY OF PHNOM PENH REMAINS CALM, PERHAPS RESIGNED IS A MORE ACCURATE TERM. ALL EYES ARE ON WASHINGTON, INCLUDING OURS. ONE REASON PHNOM PENH HAS NOT PANICKED IS THAT THE AMERICAN MISSION REMAINS HERE IN FULL FORCE AND HAS BEEN GOING ABOUT ITS BUSINESS AS USUAL.

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PAGE 06 STATE 059439

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY ASSISTANCE, PERSONNEL RESIGNATIONS, FOREIGN ASSISTANCE, TOSEC 649
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE059439
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: O:ASHANKLE
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750093-0226
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750343/aaaabmtq.tel
Line Count: 249
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <13 NOV 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STATUS REPORT BY THE AMBASSADOR AS OF MARCH 17
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PGOV, MOPS, PFOR, MASS, CB, US
To: ASWAN
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006